# The Influence of Deepfake Technology and Virtual Influencer on Purchase Intention through Trust (Study on Snack Food Product Marketing in Malang City)

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## ABSTRACT

The declining sales of snack food products in Malang City indicates a weakening of consumer purchase intention and a diminishing impact of traditional marketing techniques. Rapid advancements in digital technology have prompted businesses to integrate AI-driven innovations, such as deepfake technology and virtual influencers, to recapture consumer interest. Nevertheless, the implementation of these tools has sparked debates regarding the role of consumer trust in determining the success of digital marketing strategies on buying interest. This research aims to evaluate the impact of deepfake technology and virtual personas on purchase intention, both directly and through trust as a mediating variable, specifically within the snack food sector in Malang City. Employing a quantitative approach through survey methods, data was collected from consumers who had been exposed to AI-based marketing content on social media. The data analysis examined the intricate relationships between the research variables. The findings reveal that while both deepfake technology and virtual influencers positively affect consumer trust and purchase intention, trust itself was found to have no direct effect on buying interest. Furthermore, trust failed to act as a mediator between these AI technologies and the final purchase decision. These results suggest that consumer buying interest in Malang City is not primarily driven by deep-seated trust in the technology or digital figures. Instead, it is more heavily influenced by visual appeal, aesthetic elements, and current AI trends. Consequently, businesses should prioritize innovative and visually-oriented marketing strategies to effectively engage digital consumers.

**Keywords:** Deepfake Technology, Virtual Influencer, Trust; Purchase Intention, Snack Food Marketing.

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## INTRODUCTION

The food product market in Malang City is currently encountering substantial obstacles, characterized by a notable drop in consumer purchase intention. Local culinary entrepreneurs have reported revenue losses reaching 20%, attributed to diminished purchasing power amid deflationary pressures [3]. This downturn in business income signals a broader reduction in overall community consumption levels. During deflationary periods, individuals typically delay or cut back on spending, particularly on non-essential or secondary items like snack foods. Consequently, demand for snack products faces the risk of contraction.

Furthermore, snack foods are typically acquired based on desire rather than primary necessity. As purchasing power wanes, consumers prioritize essential goods over snack items. This shift directly impacts sales volume, presenting challenges for snack business owners in sustaining market demand. Therefore, the revenue downturn experienced by culinary businesses due to deflation reflects weakened consumer purchase intention toward snack products, highlighting the urgent need for innovative marketing strategies to recapture consumer attention. Recent statistics from the Malang City Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2025 support this observation, showing a downward trend in per capita food consumption. Despite efforts by food businesses to expand into digital channels, many report stagnant sales figures [4]. This situation suggests that traditional marketing approaches are losing their efficacy and fail to adequately stimulate buying interest among the Malang population.

The inability of conventional strategies to boost sales volume necessitates radical innovation in brand-consumer interactions. Amidst this stagnation, advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) present potential solutions through Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer implementations. These innovations enable companies to produce hyper-realistic promotional content and introduce digital figures capable of influencing consumer behavior in novel and personalized ways. In Indonesia, such technology is gaining attention as a means to address market stagnation, offering boundless creativity and superior targeting precision compared to traditional methods.

However, the success of employing such advanced technology relies heavily on consumer trust. Utilizing AI-generated faces or figures (Deepfake) introduces unique challenges; it remains uncertain whether consumers will feel connected or instead threatened by content that convincingly mimics human reality. This trust is considered pivotal: without it, even the most sophisticated technological innovations cannot restore sluggish purchase intention.

In this research context, purchase intention is defined as the consumer's tendency or plan to buy a product following an online information evaluation process [5]. Individual commitment to transact

becomes the primary target of marketing strategies, given that intention is the strongest predictor of actual future purchasing behavior. Based on its measurement dimensions, purchase intention can be identified through several key indicators: Desire to buy, Intention to Try, Considering to Buy Immediately, and Recommend to others. In studies concerning Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer impacts on snack foods in Malang City, these indicators serve as crucial parameters to assess the extent to which AI technology can encourage consumer purchase intention.

Trust is defined as the belief and willingness of consumers to rely on Virtual influencer and Deepfake technology when conveying snack food product information, reflecting the expectation that the entity possesses integrity and reliability in its marketing. Based on the theoretical framework of Toader et al. [6], the trust variable is measured through five main indicators: sincerity, honesty, truthfulness, credibility, and reliability.

Deepfake technology is defined as the utilization of advanced artificial intelligence to realistically manipulate the face or voice of public figures into snack food promotional video content, creating a more persuasive visual experience for consumers in Malang City. Leveraging famous figures' faces through this technology serves as a strategy to enhance product appeal, given its capacity to produce content that appears highly real and personal. Based on its measurement dimensions, this variable is identified through four main indicators: Information Manipulation Tactics, Perceived Deception, Cognitive Load, and Media Richness [7].

Virtual influencer is defined as a digital entity based on artificial intelligence and computer graphics designed to possess a human-like persona to act as a brand communicator on social media. According to research by Jha et al. [8], this variable is measured through five main indicators: Influencer Credibility, Personality Congruence, Virtual influencer Engagement, Trust, and Purchase Intention.

Huang & Maracic [9] discovered that Deepfake technology in marketing can impact trust, but the effect is negative (reducing trust and brand credibility) if utilized without transparency, as consumers tend to be skeptical of manipulative content on social media. Although this technology offers cost efficiency, its application in sectors heavily reliant on trust, such as banking, risks damaging brand authenticity and triggering negative consumer behavior. This indicates a research gap regarding risk mitigation strategies for brands to remain considered authentic when adopting Deepfake technology in their campaigns.

According to research conducted by Jha, Chaudhary, and Shukla [8], the use of Virtual influencer was proven to have a positive and significant influence in building trust in the global fashion industry. The unique characteristics displayed by the virtual figure are able to mitigate audience skepticism, so that the dynamics of the relationship that occurs directly determine the level of consumer confidence in the

honesty of the information conveyed. Furthermore, Jha, Chaudhary, and Shukla [8] emphasize that the trust formed is a crucial mediator that transforms positive perceptions of Virtual influencer into a real increase in purchase intention for consumers.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the influence of Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer on purchase intention, both directly and through trust as a mediating variable, in the context of snack food product marketing in Malang City. This research not only examines the partial effect of each variable but also explores how both factors collectively shape purchase intention levels. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for companies in designing policies that support AI-based marketing and create a more conducive digital environment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Deepfake Technology

Deepfake technology refers to the application of artificial intelligence-based systems to generate, modify, or synthesize visual and audio content so that it resembles the real representation of certain individuals or objects. This technology utilizes machine learning algorithms, particularly deep learning, to learn patterns of faces, voices, and movements, then reconstruct them realistically [10]. According to Mirsky and Lee [11], the term deepfake comes from a combination of the words deep learning and fake, which refers to the use of artificial neural networks to create synthetic content that is difficult to distinguish from original content.

### Virtual Influencer

Virtual influencer is a digital figure created using computer graphics technology and artificial intelligence, and presented on digital platforms as an entity that resembles a real human. Virtual influencer function as communicators or endorsers in various online activities, especially on social media, with the aim of building interaction and influence on audiences [12]. According to Jin and Ryu [13], Virtual influencer can be understood as fictional characters designed strategically to display certain identities, personalities, and communication styles like human influencers.

### Trust

Trust or confidence is a fundamental concept in social science that describes an individual's belief or certain party towards the intentions, abilities, and integrity of other parties in a relationship or interaction. Trust emerges when someone is willing to accept vulnerability with the hope that the other party will act consistently, predictably, and not harm [14]. According to Rousseau et al. [15], trust is

defined as a psychological state involving the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the actions or behavior of other parties.

**Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention or buying interest is a consumer's psychological tendency to make a purchase of a product or service after going through an evaluation process of the information received. Buying interest reflects the level of willingness and desire of consumers to take purchasing actions in the future [16]. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit [17], purchase intention is formed as a result of the interaction between consumer attitudes, perceptions of the brand, and the level of trust in the source of marketing information.

**Hypothesis**

*Effect of Deepfake Technology on Trust*

The application of Deepfake technology in marketing content has a significant impact on the formation of Trust. Based on Information Manipulation Theory, when information or visual content is perceived as the result of synthetic manipulation, it will trigger suspicion that directly damages the credibility of the information [7]. Findings by Ismail & Johansson [18] reinforce that Trust is the element most vulnerable to the use of deepfake media, where audiences tend to give lower trust ratings compared to conventional content.

$H_1$: Deepfake technology has a positive and significant effect on Trust in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Virtual Influencer on Trust*

The characteristics and credibility displayed by Virtual influencer play a vital role in determining the level of audience Trust. Through the Source Credibility Theory approach, audience perceptions of the honesty and expertise of digital information sources will determine the extent to which the information is accepted. Research by Jha et al. [8] proves that the credibility of Virtual influencer and the congruence of their personality with the image built significantly able to increase consumer Trust.

$H_2$: Virtual influencer has a positive and significant effect on Trust in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Deepfake Technology on Purchase Intention*

The use of Deepfake technology in digital marketing strategies has a significant but complex effect on Purchase Intention. Based on Dual Coding Theory, visual stimulation generated by very realistic synthetic media technology is able to process information more effectively in the consumer's mind, which

in turn can encourage buying intention [19]. Research by Perera & Hettiarachchi [20] reinforces that the level of ease and usefulness of information conveyed through deepfake media contributes positively to consumers' desire to conduct transactions.

$H_3$: Deepfake technology has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Virtual Influencer on Purchase Intention*

The use of Virtual influencer as a new face in digital marketing has proven effective in influencing consumer Purchase Intention. Through the Parasocial Interaction Theory framework, consumers can form emotional bonds with digital characters which ultimately motivate purchasing behavior [21]. Research by Jha et al. [8] emphasizes that the attractiveness and credibility possessed by virtual figures not only stop at opinion formation, but directly contribute to increasing buying intention because of the sense of connection felt by the audience.

$H_4$: Virtual influencer has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Trust on Purchase Intention*

Trust is the main foundation that determines the high and low of consumer Purchase Intention in the digital marketing ecosystem. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), a person's intention to take an action is greatly influenced by risk perception and belief in the object. Research by Jha et al. [8] empirically proves that Trust acts as an emotional bridge that transforms audience interest into real buying intention.

$H_5$: Trust has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Deepfake Technology on Purchase Intention through Trust*

The mechanism of the influence of Deepfake technology on Purchase Intention is not always direct, but depends heavily on the level of Trust felt by consumers. Based on Trust-Commitment Theory, the relationship between technology stimulation and behavioral intention can only be formed if there is a strong foundation of trust [22]. The use of synthetic media such as deepfake creates a cognitive dilemma; on one hand it provides visual appeal, but on the other hand it risks damaging authenticity perception.

$H_6$: Deepfake technology has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention through Trust in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

*Effect of Virtual Influencer on Purchase Intention through Trust*

The effectiveness of Virtual influencer in triggering Purchase Intention depends heavily on their ability to build Trust in the eyes of consumers. Based on the Source Credibility Model, a marketing message will only be internalized by the audience and transformed into behavioral intention if the source of information is considered credible and trustworthy. Research by Jha et al. [8] empirically shows that even though Virtual influencer offer high visual appeal, the effect will not automatically increase buying intention without the mediation of the Trust variable.

$H_7$: Virtual influencer has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention through Trust in snack food product marketing in Malang City.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

his study adopted a quantitative design to conduct the investigation. Numerical data were employed through this approach to objectively evaluate the associations between variables. The selection of this method was driven by the goal to statistically examine hypotheses regarding how Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer influence purchase intention, incorporating trust as a mediator.

### Research Limits

The scope of this research is restricted to four specific variables: Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer serving as independent variables, trust functioning as a mediating variable, and purchase intention acting as the dependent variable. Focus was placed exclusively on snack food consumers in Malang City, excluding external factors such as pricing, product quality, or brand image. Additionally, the use of self-reported surveys could potentially lead to response bias, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

### Variable Identification

Variable operational definitions in this study were formulated drawing from established theoretical frameworks and indicators found in previous literature. Indicators for the Deepfake technology variable include Information Manipulation Tactics, Cognitive Load, and Media Richness. The Virtual influencer variable is measured via the indicators of Influencer Credibility, Personality Congruence, and Virtual influencer Engagement. Conversely, trust is measured via Sincerity, Honesty, and Reliability. Purchase intention is defined operationally through Desire to buy, Intention to try, Considering to buy immediately, and Recommend to others.

**Participants and Setting**

Study participants consisted of consumers of snack food products based in Malang City, with a sample size of 100 individuals. Purposive sampling was the technique employed, ensuring that every participant fulfilled specific criteria, such as domicile in Malang, age range of 17-40 years, active social media usage, and prior exposure to Deepfake technology or Virtual influencer content. Data collection occurred within a digital service company context in Indonesia.

**Measurement**

*Data Collection*

Structured questionnaires were distributed to selected consumers to collect data. Serving as the main instrument, the questionnaire gathered information regarding respondent perceptions and experiences. Closed statements based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 were used to construct the questionnaire. Company documents and literature reviews provided additional secondary data to support the research framework.

*Data Analysis*

Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the collected data regarding the influence of Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer on purchase intention. Before analysis commenced, tests for validity and reliability were carried out to ensure instrument accuracy and consistency. Both the outer model and inner model were evaluated. Bootstrapping procedures were used for hypothesis testing. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) was applied to measure the proportion of variance in purchase intention accounted for by the independent variables.

**RESULTS**

Following the completion of data collection and processing stages in line with the established methodologies, this section presents the research findings obtained from the respondents, who are consumers of snack food products in Malang City. The results are organized systematically to offer a clear overview of how Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer affect consumer purchase intention, which will form the basis for a more detailed discussion in the subsequent sections.

**Demographic Characteristics**

A total of 100 respondents meeting the criteria participated in the study. Gender distribution showed 53% female and 47% male participants. Regarding age, most participants fell into the 21-25 years category (30%) and 17-20 years (26%), indicating a prevalence of Generation Z. In terms of occupation,

students comprised the largest group at 44%, with employees following at 26%. Regarding education, 40% had completed SMA/SMK, while 35% held Bachelor's degrees. Such a demographic profile reflects the digital consumer environment in Malang City.

**Outer Model Testing**

Connections between indicators and their constructs (latent variables) are depicted by the outer model. This evaluation is conducted to determine if current indicators possess validity and reliability. To assess validity for reflective indicators, criteria dictate that loading factor values should be above 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) value needs to be higher than 0.50 to be classified as valid. Regarding reliability, composite reliability values need to exceed 0.7 to be deemed reliable.

**Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results**

| Variable | Loading Factor | AVE | Composite Reliability | Crontbach's Alpha | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Deepfake Technology (X1) | > 0.70 | 0.722 | 0.912 | 0.870 | Valid & Reliable |
| Virtual Influencer (X2) | > 0.70 | 0.730 | 0.942 | 0.925 | Valid & Reliable |
| Trust (Z) | > 0.70 | 0.654 | 0.904 | 0.868 | Valid & Reliable |
| Purchase Intention (Y) | > 0.70 | 0.734 | 0.932 | 0.909 | Valid & Reliable |

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2025

Referring to the table above, all variables meet the standards for validity and reliability, confirming that indicators across all variables are valid and reliable. AVE figures for every variable are above 0.50, and Composite Reliability figures exceed 0.70.

**Inner Model Testing**

Evaluation of the inner model focuses on examining causal links between latent variables consistent with research hypotheses. Parameters evaluated within the structural model encompass the Coefficient of Determination (R Square) and Predictive Relevance (Q Square).

**Table 2. R Square Evaluation**

| Variable | R Square | R Square Adjusted | Category |
|---|---|---|---|
| Purchase Intention (Y) | 0.745 | 0.737 | Strong |
| Trust (Z) | 0.732 | 0.727 | Strong |

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2025

According to the table, the $R^2$ figure for purchase intention is 0.745, indicating that 74.5% of the variance in purchase intention is accounted for by the independent variables collectively. The $R^2$ figure for trust is 0.732, suggesting strong model capability.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The Bootstrapping method generates coefficient values, t-statistics, and p-values for hypothesis testing. Significance is established when a variable shows a T-statistic value greater than 1.96 and a P-value less than 0.05.

**Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results**

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Original Sample | T Statistic | P Values | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Deepfake Technology -> Trust | 0.433 | 6.123 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H2 | Virtual Influencer -> Trust | 0.485 | 7.173 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H3 | Deepfake Technology -> Purchase Intention | 0.409 | 5.332 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H4 | Virtual Influencer -> Purchase Intention | 0.383 | 3.627 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| H5 | Trust -> Purchase Intention | 0.143 | 1.473 | 0.141 | Rejected |
| H6 | Deepfake -> Trust -> Purchase Intention | 0.062 | 1.380 | 0.168 | Rejected |
| H7 | Virtual Influencer -> Trust -> Purchase Intention | 0.070 | 1.423 | 0.155 | Rejected |

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2025

Table results from the partial tests indicate that Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer have a significant partial impact on trust and purchase intention, given their significance values fall below 0.05 and the t-count surpasses the t-table (1.986). Conversely, trust failed to show a significant impact on purchase intention (H5 Rejected), and trust does not mediate the relationship (H6 and H7 Rejected).

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this investigation show that Deepfake technology has a significant positive impact on consumer trust in the marketing of snack food products in Malang City. This outcome confirms that the advanced nature of visual content and AI-driven personalization is capable of building perceptions regarding professionalism and technological credibility among the consumer base. These findings align with Ismail and Johansson [18], who observed that high-quality AI content can boost perceived credibility.

Moreover, Virtual influencer are verified to significantly and positively affect trust. Aspects like influencer credibility, personality congruence, and engagement can enhance psychological ease and nurture a feeling of affiliation with the brand. This corresponds with the study by Jha et al. [8], which found that virtual figures with consistent traits can lower uncertainty risks, thus reinforcing reliability dimensions in trust formation.

Additionally, the research uncovers that Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer jointly demonstrate a significant direct influence on consumer purchase intention. This outcome underscores that visual stimulation created by AI holds strong immediate appeal, able to initiate consumer buying intention without needing an extended deliberation phase. This is also in agreement with Perera and Hettiarachchi [20], who determined that the convenience and utility of information delivered via deepfake media positively contribute to the willingness to transact.

Nonetheless, a pivotal discovery in this study is that Trust does not show a significant effect on Purchase Intention ($H_5$ Rejected). This suggests that in the realm of AI technology utilization, trust by itself is inadequate to motivate an individual to execute a purchase. Consumer buying intention is more swayed by visual aesthetics, trends, or immediate product advantages rather than profound trust factors. This implies that consumer conduct tends to be more impacted by content appeal than by enduring trust relationships.

Within the scope of snack food marketing, this result might arise because snack foods are categorized as low involvement products. Buying choices for items with such traits are usually impulsive, emotional, and driven by visual cues and prevailing trends. Consumers do not need a thorough evaluation process or heavy trust considerations before buying, since the risk linked to purchasing snack food

products is comparatively low versus high-value items or those related to long-term safety and health. Furthermore, the application of technology such as Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer functions more to generate visual appeal, entertainment, and captivating digital experiences for consumers. These elements tend to be more potent in stimulating buying interest compared to establishing trust in the employed technology or digital figures. Hence, in snack food product marketing, visual components, content creativity, and digital trend relevance assume a more dominant position compared to trust aspects in shaping consumer buying intention.

Regarding the mediation impact, Trust was not established to mediate the connection between Deepfake technology and Purchase Intention ($H_6$ Rejected), nor between Virtual influencer and Purchase Intention ($H_7$ Rejected). This implies that the impact of Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer in propelling buying intention is direct. Consumers are keen to purchase due to the visual quality generated by the technology, not because of the trust mediated by the Trust variable. Stated differently, the mediating capacity of Trust does not operate significantly in the association among variables $X_1$, $X_2$, and Y.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate that Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer exert a significant and positive influence, both individually and collectively, on consumer trust and purchase intention within the snack food marketing sector in Malang City. Conversely, trust was found to lack a significant impact on purchase intention and failed to serve as a mediating variable between Deepfake technology or Virtual influencer and purchase intention. These outcomes highlight that within the AI landscape in Malang City, confidence in the system does not necessarily translate into buying behavior; instead, purchase intention is predominantly motivated by aesthetic elements and current trends rather than profound trust.

In terms of practical application, F&B industry players should focus on marketing strategies that highlight visual attractiveness and creative content, as these aspects are demonstrated to have a stronger impact on consumer buying decisions. Implementations of Deepfake technology and Virtual influencer ought to center on developing engaging, interactive, and entertaining promotional encounters for the audience. Organizations must enhance transparency regarding digital technology usage to mitigate perceptions of visual manipulation, which could otherwise undermine consumer trust.

## SUGGESTION

Subsequent inquiries may widen the scope of this work by integrating supplementary variables like perceived product value, pricing, product quality, and brand image to deliver a more complete grasp of

consumer purchase intention. Academics might also investigate aspects such as the realism level of digital personas, parasocial interactions, or the emotional connection audiences develop with digital influencers. Upcoming investigations could adopt mixed-method frameworks to acquire profound insights or implement the study across varied demographics and industrial fields to generate more solid and applicable outcomes.

## CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Fernandes Fernandes**: Conceptualization, Supervision, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Project Administration, Writing-original Draft, and Writing-review Editing. **Yunus Handoko**: Conceptualization, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, and Writing-review Editing. **Ike Kusdyah Rachmawati**: Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Writing-original Draft, and Writing-review Editing.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author declares that no known competing financial interests or personal relationships exist that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

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